

## Remedy or Medicine...the issues discussed

There has been some debate recently among Faculty members as to whether we should use the term remedy or medicine when referring to our prescriptions. It is not quite as easy as one might think as our columnist 'Potingary' explains the background.

In the same way that changing regulations and attitudes towards homeopathy have influenced how homeopathic professionals have presented their practice as variously homeopathic, complementary, holistic, integrated, etc, the nomenclature of the 'tools of our trade' has also been the subject of much discussion.

The Cambridge Dictionary defines 'medicine' as a substance that is a treatment for illness or injury and so homeopathy would seem to fit in here quite nicely. However, certainly in the UK, we are not allowed to make any claims of effectiveness for homeopathy or suggest that we are treating anything as this implies that we know the intervention will be effective. Of course, many well-known drugs are often not effective in treating the condition for which they have been prescribed, but this is a discussion for another day.

The fact remains if we are not allowed to say that homeopathy is a treatment, then how can we call it a 'medicine'? This has been a familiar line from our detractors over the years, but they seem fine with us using 'remedy' instead, leading many to opt for this 'safer' option.

Our nomenclature has also been influenced by the global nature of homeopathic practice and the ease with which it is now possible to interact with colleagues overseas. In many countries, such as Japan, the term 'medicine' must never be used when referring to homeopathy under any circumstances, though again 'remedy' is acceptable.

Here at home, the MHRA causes all kinds of confusion using the terms 'medicine', 'medicinal product' and 'remedy' interchangeably when referring to homeopathy. Manufacturers can relate tales of having been told not to use the word 'medicine' on their website, despite having fully licensed 'medicinal products'. Or a visit from the MHRA 'Medicines' Inspectorate who insist that all procedures must be followed for the manufacture of a 'medicinal product' which is specified on the manufacturing licence as a 'homeopathic remedy'.

In the final analysis, this does not really matter at all to patients who generally just want to get better, or to us the practitioners who share the same outcome goal, but it is interesting nonetheless and reflects the wider perception of homeopathic practice. What do you say...and why?

### Holding true to our roots

One of the central tenets of homeopathic treatment is that it works with the body and works with the body's innate healing knowledge in striking contrast to allopathic/conventional medicine which in its suppression of symptoms undermines our faith in our bodies' ability to constantly strive for balance and homeostasis.

Through the ages there have been healers in communities though they have varied in their outward appearance. From the witch doctor and the shamanic healer to the Delphic oracle to the Greek and Arabian medical ground breakers and to druids and wise women of old there has traditionally been an association between healing and spirituality, which at some point during the evolution from healer to apothecary to physician to the modern doctor has been lost. In so doing the medical profession has been elevated almost to a position of replacing spirituality in its dogma, tyranny and asserted unassailable right to profess what is and isn't truth.

My feeling is that in shunning the term 'remedies' we are rejecting the wisdom which was second nature to our ancestors and that we are foolish to ignore. In its place we erect a shrine to medicine as a replacement of and in denial of our own healing power.

I recently started a herbal medicine course and read a passage written by the tutor Amaia Dadachanji for The School of Health:

'Many of the old texts are hugely informative and highly regarded, they are also mostly written by men. Men have made amazing contributions to medicine as we know it now and herbal medicine alike... **There is**

**however, a huge body of knowledge held and shared, and almost lost at certain times throughout history, although her-story. The stories of women.** The wise women of old, the witches persecuted for their knowledge, the damned hags and the insulted crones, all of whom had much to teach us, and who were suppressed or ostracised by society.'

Whilst we must indeed move with the times and research and further our knowledge of complementary therapies through scientific method, we should not throw out the baby with the bath water. We should not deny the wisdom of our forbears. We must give them the respect they deserve. The world of conventional medicine ought not to dictate to us how we conduct the practice of complementary therapies, in which we are the experts. We should forge ahead with our research according to the dictates of our own integrity and unique understanding of the human body from a holistic perspective in the interests of our patients and not in obeisance to the exacting demands that the sceptics place on us, which we will never meet.

*'But do not despise the lore that has come down from distant years; for oft it may chance that old wives keep in memory word of things that once were needful for the wise to know.'*

*Celeborn, Lord of the Rings, JRR Tolkien*

There is a wholesomeness and poeticism to the word remedies, which is of itself healing and reminds us that health is more than the domain of modern medicine.

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### Not just a simple choice - The bigger picture to be considered

Words matter. Phrases are emotive. They convey much more than the sum of their parts (rather like holistic medicine).

Homeopathy is seen by its detractors as archaic, unscientific or placebo. The manner in which the profession presents itself to the world impacts the way in which it is perceived. As such, it is incumbent upon the profession to present itself in a scientific and professional manner, and that includes the words that are used to describe the science and art of healing.

'Remedy' was a word of its time - when medicine was crude and unscientific, relying on concoctions and tinctures to heal the sick. It conjures up images of a wizened old person, mixing potions over a kitchen table, far removed from the pristine, clinical laboratories of modern medical practice. It has associations with folk and traditional medicine (much of which has not been rigorously researched). 'Remedy' also has connotations of treating minor ailments that are likely to be mild and self-limiting, not serious or chronic diseases.

The word 'medicine', by contrast, is altogether more professional. It has a gravitas commensurate with the conditions it aims to treat ie. everything from gross pathology to chronic, debilitating disease. As we know, homeopathy treats all of the above. Furthermore, it goes far beyond treating the physical body, or the mind, in isolation. It is truly holistic. Its vehicle of healing therefore - the homeopathic 'medicines' or homeopathic 'remedies' - need to reflect this phenomenal power to heal the sick. To bring balance to both body and mind - often far beyond the hopes and expectations of our patients and ourselves.

The word 'medicine' is used in modern Western medical practice in part to disassociate itself from the hit and miss world of home remedies that were deemed 'unscientific', due to their largely anecdotal evidence base, lacking high quality clinical trials. Ironically however, according to the BMJ's own research, only 18% of current allopathic medical

treatments are based on good evidence (BMJ, 22 Jun 2017).

Aligning the homeopathic profession with a perceived archaic, unscientific word such as 'remedy' harms the image and reputation of homeopathy not only within the wider scientific community, but the public at large, who are disproportionately influenced by homeopathy's detractors and have an inherent trust in Western medical practice, in part due to spectacular advances in medical science and surgery. Regrettably however, these advances have not percolated through to all areas of medical treatment and indeed, the prolific use of pharmaceutical drugs has contributed to both a worsening in quality of life, as well as premature death. Peter Götzsche, co-founder of the reputed Cochrane Collaboration, estimated that prescribed medication is the third most common cause of death globally after heart disease and cancer (The Guardian, 30 Aug 2018).

Homeopathic medicines, by contrast, are completely safe, the vast majority being energetic in nature (ie. well beyond Avogadro's number). Homeopathic pharmacy is precise, reproducible and has stood the test of time (over two centuries). Its description should reflect the scientific nature of both its production and use, by using the word 'medicine', rather than 'remedy'.

Conversely, the word 'medicine' can conjure up negative associations, such as unwanted effects (or so-called 'side effects') of pharmaceutical drugs, even though this does not relate to homeopathic medicines. However, the benefit of using this word outweighs the less professional word 'remedy', thereby putting the homeopathic profession on an equal footing with the best of Western medicine - seen by many around the world as the Holy Grail of medical treatment - and for some conditions, rightly so.

Whilst this debate might seem relatively minor, it is indicative of the way in which the homeopathic profession presents itself to the world at large. The non-homeopathic community are

likely unaware that homeopathy can treat significant acute and chronic disease. If homeopathy is to thrive it needs to address the criticisms, become more professional, sharper and outward facing, so that homeopathy can continue to offer and secure its unique contribution to curing disease and enhancing health and wellness, for future generations.

As an increasing amount of high-quality research is being carried out in homeopathy around the world, the time has long passed for not only our Journals, but all our communications to be clear, concise, unambiguous and aligned within the profession itself, so that we can provide clarity, professionalism and congruity to the world at large.

Many of us will recall some twenty years ago or so, there was a debate about the spelling of the word homeopathy itself - previously spelt 'homoeopathy' (denoting the umlaut from the original German). The non-homeopathic community were confused and muddled by the two spellings which existed concurrently, with homeopaths spelling it both ways. In this instance, common sense prevailed and the 'oeo' was eventually dropped for the simpler version.

Hahnemann himself was aghast at the lack of rigorous science in the medical practices of his day. Around two and a half centuries later, the homeopathic profession is called upon to move with the times and scrutinise how we present ourselves to the world.

Where will homeopathy be positioned in the healthcare of the future? Whilst it continues to thrive in some countries, in the UK, homeopathy struggles to maintain the already tiny foothold it has. If we want homeopathy to take its place alongside the best that allopathic medicine and CAM therapies have to offer, we have to scrutinise and present the profession appropriately.

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